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Next to Northern Mandarin, Southwestern Mandarin is the largest dialect group in China in terms of the number of people who speak it and the area which it covers. Like Northern Mandarin, its dialects are fairly homogeneous. The following are some of its characteristics: 197

1. The initials n and l are not distinguished except in some Yunnan dialects. However, there is a tendency to treat these two sounds as conditioned variants or partially conditioned variants of a sound unit. That is to say, l is heard before mid and low vowels while n is heard before high vowels; or, although either n or l may occur as free variants before mid and low vowels, n occurs regularly before high vowels. 197 194

2. There are no retroflex sounds because such sounds are replaced by dental sibilants; thus Northern Mandarin chu (pig) becomes tsu, shan (mountain) becomes san.

3. The guttural nasal ng usually precedes the Northern Mandarin zero-initial when the latter is not a high vowel. Thus, words pronounced like ai (to love), e (forehead), and en (favor) of Northern Mandarin, become ngai, nge, and ngen, respectively.

4. When initial h precedes a syllabic u, it is changed to f; thus, Northern Mandarin hu (tiger) becomes fu.

5. The common Northern Mandarin unrounded back vowel ə̂, found in such words as kə̂, sometimes also written ko. (elder brother), hə̂, or ho (river), is replaced by a rounded o generally.

The same back vowel in other Northern Mandarin words such as te (to obtain), se (color), che (this), k'e (guest), etc., is replaced by a front vowel e (which sounds like a in chaotic) in many dialects in this region.

6. Northern Mandarin final uo is replaced by ue in such words as kuo (nation) and huo (or), which become kue and hue respectively in Southwestern Mandarin.

7. Northern Mandarin final üeh is replaced by io in such words as hsüeh (to learn) and chüeh (to become aware), which become hsio and chio respectively in Southwestern Mandarin.

8. There is only one final nasal, n, after the vowels ə, i, u.

9. The four tones of Northern Mandarin are described as high-level, high-rising, low-dipping, and high-falling; most of the Southwestern Mandarin dialects have a tonal pattern consisting of the high-level, low slightly falling, falling, and rising tones.

10. Within this dialect group, the following local variations are observed:

a) Dialects spoken in some areas along the upper reaches of the Yangtze River have preserved the ancient "entering" tone, which is generally associated with a "lax" vowel. Thus these dialects have five, instead of four, tones.

b) In certain areas, the common diphthing ie is changed to the simple vowel i; thus Northern Mandarin chieh (elder sister) becomes chi.

c) Some dialects in Yunnan and Kweichow lack the rounded high front vowel ü; thus Northern Mandarin nü (woman) becomes ni, and chü (to dwell) becomes chi.

B. Hakka

All Hakka people in Szechwan Province are bilingual; they speak Hakka at home and Southwestern Mandarin outside their village. Although they believe that Hakka remains their "ancestors' language," it actually has been very much influenced by Southwestern Mandarin and has lost many of its features except the following:

1. Many aspirated initials are substituted for unaspirated initials; thus Northern Mandarin tu (to cross a river) becomes t'u, and tso (to sit) becomes ts'o.

2. The initial v replaces the zero-initial u in Northern Mandarin; thus Northern Mandarin wu (house) becomes vu, and wan (ten thousand) becomes van.

3. There is no ü sound except in a few words apparently borrowed from Mandarin.

4. In many words, the diphthong oi replaces the Northern Mandarin ai, and the final on replaces an; thus Northern Mandarin kai (should) becomes koi, and an (dark) becomes on.

194 5. There are six to seven tones, two of which
197 are derived from the ancient "entering" tone and associated with final p, t, and k.

C. Kam-Tai

Kam-tai, like the other two major non-Chinese dialect groups spoken in this region, belongs to the extensive Sin-Tibetan family which includes Chinese dialects. The Sino-Tibetan language family, generally speaking, is: (a) monosyllabic -- the ultimate constituents of the language are all monosyllabic; (b) tonal -- when normally stressed, the pattern of pitch of a syllable determines its meaning; (c) uninflectional forms virtually do not exist. The special characteristics of Kam-Tai can be further described as follows:

1. It has eight or more tones. This results from the development into two tones of each of the four tones in ancient Sino-Tibetan languages.

2. There are pre-glottalized voiced consonants, such as b and d. This is especially true of Kam dialects.

3. Consonant clusters are preserved, in Tai, but they do not appear as initials in Kam dialects.

4. Long and short vowels are differentiated.

[193] 5. Word order, in some respects, is different from Chinese dialects. For example, hao jen (good man) in Chinese becomes jen hao in Kam-Tai.

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197 6. Certain dialects, such as those spoken by the Pai-yi people in southern Yunnan, have preserved aspirated consonants as initials.

7. Examples of Kam-Tai sounds are given below:

	Kam	Tai (as spoken in southern Yunnan)	Tai (as spoken in eastern Yunnan)
palm	fa	p'a	va
eye	da	t'a	ta
fish	mum	pja	pla
egg	tai	kjai	klai

D. Miao-Yao

Earlier scholars have grouped Yao with Tai described above, and Miao with the Mon-Khmer language family. However, further comparative studies have shown that a greater affinity exists between Miao and Yao and that there seems to be more reason to group these two as a separate branch of the Sino-Tibetan family. This group has the following common features:

1. In Miao there is no final consonant except the guttural nasal ng and rarely the dental nasal n. But final consonants m, n, ng, and p, t, k are common in Yao dialects.

2. Initial consonant clusters are common in Miao, especially pre-nasalized ones such as mp, nt, mpl, mpr, etc., but rare in Yao.

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194 3. Gutturals and uvulars in the initial position are differentiated in Miao.

4. Many words in Yao are borrowed from either Chinese or Tai.

5. The following are examples of Miao and Yao words as spoken by different groups of the frontier peoples.

	Miao	Yao
water	ong ai	wam vom
door	tong tai	keng keng
house	pla pra	piau piau
to die	tu to	tai tai

E. Tibetan-Burmese (Tibeto-Burman)

The use of prefixes, syllabic or assyllabic, and the subject-object-verb word order are common features of this group. In comparison with Kam-Tai, this group has a much simpler tonal pattern. Four sub-groups of Tibetan-Burmese are spoken in this region:

1. Tibetan

a) Unlike the Tibetan spoken in Tibet, this sub-group has preserved the prefixes and final consonants of ancient Tibetan.

b) Each word has two forms, "common" and "honorific"; the latter is used when the speaker wishes to be polite. For example:

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	Common	Honorific
eye	mig	spyan
nose	sna	shangs
mouth	kha	zhal

2. Lolo-Moso This sub-group includes a number of aboriginal languages and has a complicated initial system. In addition to the common initials, there are also pre-nasalized voiced stops and affricatives such as mb, nd, ndz, ngg, etc.

3. Kachin The only general characteristic so far ascertained of the people who speak this sub-group is that they tend to pronounce the prefixes as separate syllables.

197 4. Others Small minority nationality groups inhabiting the Yunnan-Burma border zone speak a variety of dialects. Information on these minor dialects has been extremely scanty and it is generally assumed that they belong to the Burmese branch of the Tibetan-Burmese group.

F. Other Non-Chinese Dialect Groups

A number of non-Chinese dialects, which are not sub-groups of the Sino-Tibetan family, are also spoken in this region. The Palaung (with about 5,000 population), Puman (14,000 population), and Wa (about 56,000 population) each has its own dialect. These dialects are related to the Peguan (or Mon) language spoken in Burma and the Cambodian (or Khmer) language spoken in Indo-China. Linguistically they come under the Palaung-Wa group which uses more affixes than dialects of the Sino-Tibetan family.